



Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

Surviving and thriving during allergy season

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Unusually warm weather has brought an early start to the allergy season here in Colorado. Seasonal allergens such as outdoor molds, tree, weed and grass pollens can lead to itching of the eyes, ears and nose, sneezing, runny nose and nasal stuffiness. It's often referred to as "hay fever." These allergy triggers can also be troublesome for people with asthma, leading to coughing, wheezing, chest tightness and difficulty breathing. If you find yourself experiencing these symptoms around this time of year, you may have allergies or asthma.

Control of allergy symptoms can sometimes be accomplished by avoiding the triggers. This includes keeping windows shut, running the air conditioner to help filter the air in a home, and avoiding the outdoors during peak pollen periods. If outdoor activities, such as mowing the lawn, are necessary, wearing a pollen mask may help.

Inevitably, some people will need medications to help them cope with allergies. Over-the-counter drugs will work for some while others may require a complex mix of pills, nasal sprays, eye drops or inhalers. A few may opt for allergy shots which can desensitize them to the allergen.

Allergy medicines have been available for more than 60 years. Many of the older medicines only lasted a few hours or made people sleepy. In the past 20 years, improvements provided longer lasting control of symptoms with a lower likelihood of making people drowsy. Some of these newer medicines are available over-the-counter. If use of over-the-counter medications does not control your symptoms, seek medical care from your primary care provider. Your primary care provider or allergist can also prescribe medications for better control of symptoms with very few side effects. People who are already taking other medications should always remember to talk to their provider or pharmacist about the possibility of drug interactions.

According to the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, half of all asthma cases are related to allergies. Thousands of patients die in the United States every year from asthma attacks, many of them brought on by allergen exposures. If you think you have asthma, you should never ignore the symptoms, and try to "wait it out." Symptoms include shortness of breath, chest tightness or pain, coughing or wheezing.

If a primary care provider thinks a patient's allergies or asthma requires the expertise of an allergist, he or she will refer that person to the allergy clinic for testing. Allergy testing can determine the specific allergic triggers and can help providers recommend a more effective treatment regimen. A referral to the allergist by your PCP is required for this visit and any necessary testing.



Finally, although most people think about allergies as Spring approaches, don't forget about those year-round triggers! Pets, indoor molds, cockroaches and dust mites can also cause flare ups. While dust mites and cockroaches are infrequently encountered in this area, travel to most places in the United States can bring you into close contact with them and spark problems.

Getting control of these symptoms is important! It means fewer missed days of school or work, less fatigue and a lower likelihood of disease complications, such as sinus infections or hospitalizations due to asthma attacks. For more information about allergies and asthma or daily pollen levels visit AAAAI.org or ACAAI.org.